

# That's using your head! Or, how to assess your child's knock on the noggin.

Your son's baseball league has just upped the ante, moving from  "coach pitch" to "kids pitch." The good news is that your budding major league pitcher gets some practice. The bad news is that the pitches can be wild. Thank goodness for batting helmets!

So what if the unthinkable happens? You are cheering your child on, when suddenly the wild pitch (or the hit ball, or the wild throw to first base) wacks into your child's head. He is knocked down and you go running.

First evaluate if your child is conscious. Passing out even momentarily is a reason to seek medical attention right away. Most likely he will not have passed out and will want to return to play. However, the safest bet is to have your child sit out the rest of the game.

Next determine if your child is bleeding inside his head. You may see a growing lump on his head which looks gruesome. However, we pediatricians are less concerned about bleeding or bruising that occurs on the outside of his skull than about possible bleeding inside his skull.

How can you tell where the bleeding is? Again, a loss of consciousness, or passing out, is a worrisome event that may signal bleeding on the inside. In addition, watch for blurry or double vision ("I see two mommies!"), inability to speak clearly or rationally, difficulty walking or loss of balance, vomiting more than once (some kids vomit once when they are scared or in pain), or headache so severe that it is not relieved by acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil). Not all symptoms appear immediately.

So now your child has cheered the team on to victory, enjoyed the after-game snack, has forgotten about the trauma, and is nodding off

in the back seat of your car. As you drive him home you remember some vague advice about not letting your child fall asleep after a head injury. Now what?

Go ahead and let your child sleep for a couple of hours, he probably is tired both from the game and from the injury. You have the rest of the day to observe him.

Sometimes, injuries are not conveniently timed. If a head injury occurs right before bedtime, you will not be able to watch for signs of internal head bleeding because your child will be sleeping. The best way to assess him is to wake him briefly every 2-3 hours throughout the night.

If your child makes it to 24 hours without symptoms, it is unlikely your child is bleeding inside his head. However, if your child still seems “off” he needs medical attention. Even if he is not bleeding, he may have a concussion (now termed “traumatic brain injury”).

Although it’s never easy to see your child hurt, whether it’s a scrape on the knee or a bump on the head, you can empower yourself by knowing what to watch for. Now that’s using your noggin!

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